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THE
LOGIC

Formey/H.
K

OF

PROBABILITIES.

Disce justitiam moriti, Et non temere Divos.

Formey J.H.S.

L O N D O N :

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS little PIECE was publish'd
in *French* last Winter, at the
Author's Expence, at *Berlin*. Com-
mon Fame gives it to *M. Le Profes-*
sieur Formey, whose Name is already
sufficiently known to the learned
World. 'Tis suited to all Men's Ca-
pacities; and consequently we hope,
from the interesting Nature of the
Subject, and the Author's peculiar
Manner of treating it, that it may not
be unuseful in this sceptical and irre-
ligious Age. 46-1-8-1/4



CHARACTERS DE LE BRUYERE,
Tom. p. 470, Edit. d'Amst. 1720.

DO the *Free-thinkers* know that we denominate them *such* by way of irony? For what can shew greater *narrowness* of mind than to be doubtful concerning the principle, the object, the destination of their being, their life, their senses, their knowledge? What greater discouragement can there be, than to be uncertain whether one's soul be not mere matter like reptiles and stones: and if it be not perishable too, like those low parts of the creation? Is there not more of spirit and magnificence of thought in admitting into our minds the idea of a Being superior to all beings; to whom every person and thing bears a relation and dependence; a Being, supremely perfect, pure, who began not to exist, and who cannot cease from existing; of whom our soul is the image; and a portion, if I may so say, as being a spirit and immortal?

CHARACTÈRES DE LA BRUYÈRE
LA RELIGION. Tom.

POÈME par M. Racine. Chant, v. 140

SI ma Religion n'est qu'erreur & que fable,
 Elle me tend, hélas ! une piège inevitable.
 Quel ordre ! quel éclat ! & quel enchaînement !
 L'unité du dessein fait mon étonnement.
 Combien d'obscurités tout à coup éclaircies !
 Historiens, martyrs, figures, prophéties,
 Dogmes, raisonnemens, écrits, tradition,
 Tout s'accord & se suit ; & la seduction
 A la vérité même en tout point est semblable.
 Deistes, dites nous quel génie admirable
 Nous fait de toutes parts si bien envelopper,
 Que vous devez rougir vous mêmes d'échapper.
 Quand votre Dieu pour vous n'auroit qu'indif-
 férence,
 Pourroit-il, publiant sa gloire qu'on offense,
 Permettre à cette erreur qu'il semble autoriser,
 D'abuser son nom, pour nous tyranniser ?

IF Christ's Religion be but dream and air,
 I tremble at th' inevitable snare.
 Connexion, order, beauty, force combine;
 Stupendous harmony of one design!
 Meridian truth breaks forth, and darkness flies:
 Historians, martyrs, figures, prophecies,
 The reasonings and the precepts of the Lord,
 The written doctrine, and the oral word,
 Flow each from each, and all in one accord. }
 If this be fraud, 'tis so supremely fine
 That wise men cry, 'tis Truth's, 'tis God's de-
 sign!
 Say, Deists, what superior thought could
 frame
 A scheme so infinite, and yet the same:
 Where parts and whole, where all with all
 conspire?
 Blush, that you have not genius to admire!
 If God for you had but a cold regard,
 (Yourselfes of slighted mercy half debarr'd)
 Yet would he, mindless of his bounteous pow'r,
 Tho' erring nature grieves him ev'ry hour,
 Allow, that falshood should mislead mankind,
 Afflict the body, and enslave the mind?

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Albeit the body, and enslave the mind;
Yet would he, mingles of his bounty now,
(Yourselves of lighted mercy half deny)
If God for you had but a colder eye,
Blush, that you have not given us to deny;
Where parts and a whole, where all with all
A scheme so infinite, and for the time
Sly, Ourselves, what glorious thought could

That with mercy, the Father, the God, be
If this be so, in the mystery of
Flow each from each, and all in all;
The written doctrine, and the oral word,
The mysteries and the precept of the Lord,
Hillmans, martyrs, figures, prophecies,
Meddling truth breaks forth, and darkness flies;
Slips the narrow of one design;
Corruption, order, beauty, form, and grace;
I amble at in, heavenly, human,
T. Christ's Religion be but dreamed in air.

THE
LOGIC
 OF
PROBABILITIES.

WHY ought we to take the alarm, the very first moment that the Unbelievers begin to put themselves in motion? we render them dangerous and formidable by supposing them *such*.

II.

Are we obliged to provide a distinct answer to all the enemies of Religion? Have they made any satisfactory reply to *Abbadie*, *Sherlock*, or *Gibson*? When they have put themselves in a condition to refute the works of such authors, then 'tis allowed them (in case a full answer be wanting on our part) to sing their songs of triumph.

III.

There are *two* ways of deciding disputes; by *majority* of voices, or *superiority* of judgment. Neither *alternative* favours the *Free-thinkers*. Is their number *greater* than that of *Believers*? God forbid. Or, Are
they

they more respectable for their knowledge and virtues.——Place in one scale the holy Fathers and writers of the Church from the promulgation of Christianity to the present time: add to them all those great men, who have undertaken to defend the cause of God without taking upon themselves the Ecclesiastical character; as a *Morney*, a *Grotius*, a *Dodwell*, and *Raine* the younger; oppose to this cloud of witnesses *Vanini*, *Spinoza*, *Toland*, *Collins*, *Woolston*; re-inforce them with the light-armed troops of the present age, the authors of the * *Philosophical Thoughts* and † *Man a Machine*; [we shall not take into account such wretched scriblers as he that publish'd, ‡ *Moses's veil removed*, &c.] and

* † ‡ Three superficial free-thinking Books, lately published abroad.

then, all things rightly consider'd and duly allowed, we shall soon see on which side the balance turns.

IV.

Perhaps there remains still a new expedient to confound *infidelity*, and reduce it to silence—I name *this*, the *Logic of Probabilities*.

V.

Dare I presume that the word *Logic* will not displease our adversaries? Or dare I hope that the custom they have acquired of attacking religion by sallies of imagination and ludicrous expressions has not induced them long ago to bid an everlasting farewell to all sorts of reasoning? If some there are who labour under
these

these circumstances, they have my full consent to stop here; for my own part I shall venture notwithstanding, to carry my plan into execution, since (in charity as well as truth) I think I should offend against equity in supposing that all Unbelievers had made a firm resolution never to reason. What I propose, *is*, (or at least *ought* to be) an induction deduced in due form from their conversations, their writings, and their conduct.

VI.

I wave at present all pretensions to the right of a rigorous *demonstration*; I shall supersede (*pro tempore*) all appeals to *moral evidence*; and desire only that every matter of belief and fact, *Probability* may confine our researches

searches within its own limits. "On this spot of ground I chuse to decide the combat; let judicious and impartial readers be the umpires; and then we shall soon see on which side the advantage turns.

VII.

I ask at first setting out, if the following questions do not demand *some* attention? For example, If there be a God, a Providence, a Revelation, a Religion, a life to come? Is it an *indifferent* matter to deceive one's self in all these points? Or can that time be said to be *wasted*, which we employ in the examination of *them*? And lastly, Is that prudence *ridiculous*, which equally interests its self, and takes the same precautions in these matters as men generally use,

use, in obtaining a Post, in purchasing an estate, or in the affair of marriage? *Those* who dare maintain the affirmative, are at present out of the terms of the dispute, according to my state of the question; consequently to such persons I have nothing to say. For every dispute requires certain common principles, reciprocally agreed on, if men treat these sublime matters, as trifles, they have no ground to set their feet on: we must wait better times.

VIII.

Religion is then an *interesting* object, or at least would be one, if its reality were well proved. This is the *defile*, or pass, where I stop my adversaries.

IX. Pray,

IX.

Pray, Gentlemen, (for I address myself to you,) what *criterion* do you wish to act by in the affairs of this world? *What* determines you to seek or avoid any object? To what *rule* or *guide* do you consecrate all your cares and labours? If the light of *demonstration* must ever come to your assistance, you run the risque of sitting with your arms folded during your whole lives; for there is no undertaking in the present world, of which the event is *infallible*. Consequently then human prudence proceeds on *other principles*. You put your selves in motion on the first *glimmering* prospect of success: You redouble your activity in proportion as that light *encreases*: and in general, you augment your *degrees* of zeal

zeal according to *those* of *probability*.

X.

You proceed still farther, and with justice. When an object presents it self extremely *desirable*, and when the possession of it is *important* to you, not only *favourable* appearances excite your zeal, but even *contrary ones* do not dismay you ; and the impossibility of success must be almost *incontestable*, before you bid adieu to your designs. Man is fruitful in framing *chimerical* projects, and far from *neglecting* probabilities, where they *offer* themselves, is apt to suppose them to exist, where they exist *not*.

XI.

But this *lively, enterprizing* creature, Man, when once he casts

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his eyes on Religion, immediately changes his character; his ardor abates, he grows cold as ice. People in vain solícite him to do for *another* life an hundredth part of what he does for *this*.

XII.

Whence proceeds this indolence? We can attribute it but to *two* causes. Either Religion is not *worth* the pains we bestow on it, or if it be, it is so devoid of *probability*, that a man of good Sense, without dishonouring his character, cannot bestow his time on examining it, and in professing its belief.

XIII.

We have already rejected the *first* of these suppositions, and are authorised

thorised therein by the professed avowal of *many* Free-thinkers, who, tho' mis-led by sophistical appearances, yet cease not to preserve the general principles of reasoning. They acknowledge that Religion would be an excellent gift from Heaven; and that all men ought to wish for *such* a divine emanation.

XIV.

It therefore remains only, to place *this* Religion in such a situation, as it may be capable at least, by the *probability* of its proofs, to excite in us the same *degree* of attention, as that which induces us to act in the common course of life. We ought to convince men, that the advantage annexed to piety, has as much right to awaken their industry, as an affair at *Madagascar*, or in the *Mis-*

fissipi: which two causes were once sufficient to put thousands of persons into violent and perpetual action.

XV.

Let us now contemplate the question in *two* points of view: First, in it self, that is to say, independent from all proofs of matter of fact; or, secondly, divested of the *assistance* of these proofs.

XVI.

Is it more *probable* in it self, that an assemblage or a combination of parts, *each imperfect and continually changeable*, should form a whole, which is a necessary, immutable, and supremely perfect Being; or that we should seek for the reason of the whole in another Being, who pos-

possesses *all these perfections*, without the least *mixture of imperfection*?

XVII.

Is it more *probable* in it self, that things arranged by astonishing art, and invariably relative to precise and useful ends, should be *such*, merely because they are *such*, and not proceed rather from an *infinite Intelligence*, who pre-ordained their proportions, order, and destination?

XVIII.

Is it more *probable* in it self, to believe that if there is a God, he takes no care of his creatures, and abandons them to blind destiny, or to believe a Providence, which preserves, sustains, and directs all things?

XIX. Is

XIX.

Is it more *probable* in it self, that the perpetual and inseparable idea of our liberty, which we carry about us, is false, and illusory; — that we are pure machines on whose choice and power nothing depends? — or ought we not rather to admit the truth of the contrary opinion? Can we persuade ourselves easily, after having performed a good or evil action, that it did not depend absolutely on us, to have acted in another manner?

XX.

Is it more *probable* in it self, to establish an absolute equality, an unmeaning *indifference* in all actions, so, that, to kill one's benefactor, or make grateful returns to him, are merely

merely matters that depend on education, or are at most regulated by a principle of convenience? Is *such* a *System*, I say, more probable than the doctrine of intrinseck morality, honesty, right, and natural law?

XXI.

Is it more *probable* in it self, to consider Man, (if not as a fortuitous Being) yet at least as a Being, designed to act a *certain* part in human life, (where perhaps his destination is scarce visibly sketched out, and where he sometimes disappears before he is born?) Or to extend one's views on to a *continuation of existence*, to a farther explanation and discovery of things; in short, to a certain state, *supplemental* to this, if I may so speak?

XXII. And

XXII.

And is PROBABILITY now, too *high-founding* a name to give to these ideas, founded in the very nature of our soul, and the present world? Or can any one refuse to give *these* ideas *that* name, except he be plunged into a voluntary and judicial blindness?

XXIII.

Behold *another* series of propositions: which contains the *facts* that constitute the ground-work of Religion. God, on the foundation of natural principles (which we purpose to develop), hath built an edifice, the materials of which consist of *various Revelations*, by which he has communicated his will to
men,

men, and of which his dearly beloved only Son, *Jesus Christ*, sent for the salvation of mankind, is the *corner-stone*. All this is contained in *one* book, which we revere, as descended from Heaven; we rest our belief on *it*, not only out of regard to the depositions of men every way *credible*, but because its *authenticity* hath been attested by the most distinguished *miracles*. On the whole therefore are all these things pure fables, and chimera's unworthy of attention? — or rather, do not we find in them some *certain degree* of probability, which ought to make an impression on the minds of reasonable beings? But let us continue to finish our *Examen*.

XXIV.

Is it *more probable* that the *Jews*, to whom the *first promises* were vouchsafed, and among whom they were lodged, should have been seduced by an *Impostor*, who made them believe, that God had conducted them out of *Egypt* by a *strong Hand and a stretched-out arm*; That the *Egyptians* their oppressors had been visited with all sorts of judgments, whilst no evil approached them; That the *Canaanites* should be exterminated before their face, to procure them the possession of a land *flowing with milk and honey*; and that in all this series of extraordinary facts God should never cease to give them *incontestable signs*

signs of his presence and assistance? Is it *more probable*, I say, that the *Jews* should have adopted and preserved such traditions, *without foundation*, and have made them the ground-work of an external worship extremely *fatiguing* and *disagreeable*, than to acknowledge on our parts the authenticity of the facts, and the truth of the Archives of this elected People?

XXV.

Is it *more probable*, that this uninterrupted series of *prophecies*, which from age to age declared events that all human art could never foresee, and afterwards pointed out in particular a combination of characters which becoming more distinct, in

proportion as the event approached have so well depicted the *Messiah*, that 'twas next to impossible to mistake him when he appeared; — Is it *more probable*, that This was rather the work of chance, than the effect of heavenly direction? For as to an *imposture*, how can any one suppose it? At what *period* of time can we place its rise? Or how make a whole nation accessory, when that nation was the very *depositum* of these oracles?

XXVI.

Is it *more probable*, that this **JESUS**, who, on one hand, united in himself all the characters foretold by the Prophets; and on the other hand, exhibited by his death an

an example of the most eminent virtues, should be an impostor, and not rather an holy Personage, whose mission was truly authenticated from Heaven?

XXVII.

Is it *more probable* that *Miracles*, which had for their objects *all the parts* of the natural system, which were performed in a manner the most public, and the least equivocal, and which cotemporary persons, however interested to contest them, never durst deny; — should be rather *false*, than *true*?

XXVIII.

Is it *more probable*, that a multitude of false witnesses should start
up

up together, and for the pleasure of dispersing their falsehoods, should renounce all sorts of interest, expose themselves to innumerable evils, to severe and inevitable tortures, joining at the same time to such disinterestedness the most beautiful lessons and the most noble examples of virtue? Is it, I say, *more consistent with truth*, to consider these people as false witnesses, than to render homage to their evidence, or at least to acknowledge, that they are worth the pains of being heard impartially, and that one ought diligently to examine what they have deposed?

III. XXIX

is it more probable, that a number of false witnesses should join
up

XXIX.

XXIX.

Is it *more probable*, that *Christianity*, divested of all secular aid, preached by persons without authority and credit, opposed by all that was powerful and respectable in the world, contrary in it self (which was yet more) to the favourite passions of the human heart? — Is it more probable, that *such a doctrine* should establish it self naturally, by chance, by intrigue, by the concurrence of second causes; — or ought we not rather to ascend to some superior assistance, and to acknowledge that God *had not placed his treasure in vessels of earth, but in order the better to make manifest the excellence of his strength?*

XXX.

XXX.

Lastly, Is it *more probable*, that a *Religion* which sets forth at present in the completest manner all our duties towards God, our neighbour, and our selves; which furnishes the *only resources* against the fatal consequences of sin; which teacheth men to be good masters, good subjects, good parents and husbands; faithful, in a word, to all their engagements; a *Religion* which would anticipate the Paradisiacal state here on earth, if its doctrines were faithfully followed? ——— Is a Religion like this a becoming object of railery, insults, contumelies, profanation, and sacrilege; or ought it not rather to be considered as *God's gift*, the greatest

greatest blessing to society, the stable support of our *present* well-being, and the only path to our *future* happiness?

XXXI.

Behold what I entitle THE LOGIC OF PROBABILITIES. Whoever can prove to me, that he takes the *securer* and more *sensible* side of the question, by trampling Religion under his feet; whoever can convince me, that we ought to follow principles that decide in a *quite different* manner, shall immediately be acknowledged to have *obtained* the cause.

XXXII.

But if, on the contrary, the Enemies of Religion act in some degree like one who hath the hardiness to venture through the thickest fire of musketry, in order to find a small piece of money; or like another, who purchases a quantity of tickets in a lottery, where there are nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine blanks to one prize (and yet these disproportions and disadvantages are not comparable to those into which Irreligion plunges a man :) If such be the *Logic of Unbelievers*, I conjure them not to be so lavish of their ironical flings, and of that pertness of imagination which is inexhaustible in producing excuses and
re-

replies; a time may come when their *gaiety* of spirit may fail them, and be obliged to change it of self into the most BITTER, (God forbid the most UNAVAILING!) of all REPENTANCES.

F I N I S.

replicat; a time may come when
their goods may fail them
and be obliged to change it of sell
into the (God for
did the most unavailing) of all
REPRESENTANCES.



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